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Robert
Aitken

artistic
director

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1970

twenty
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season

1995



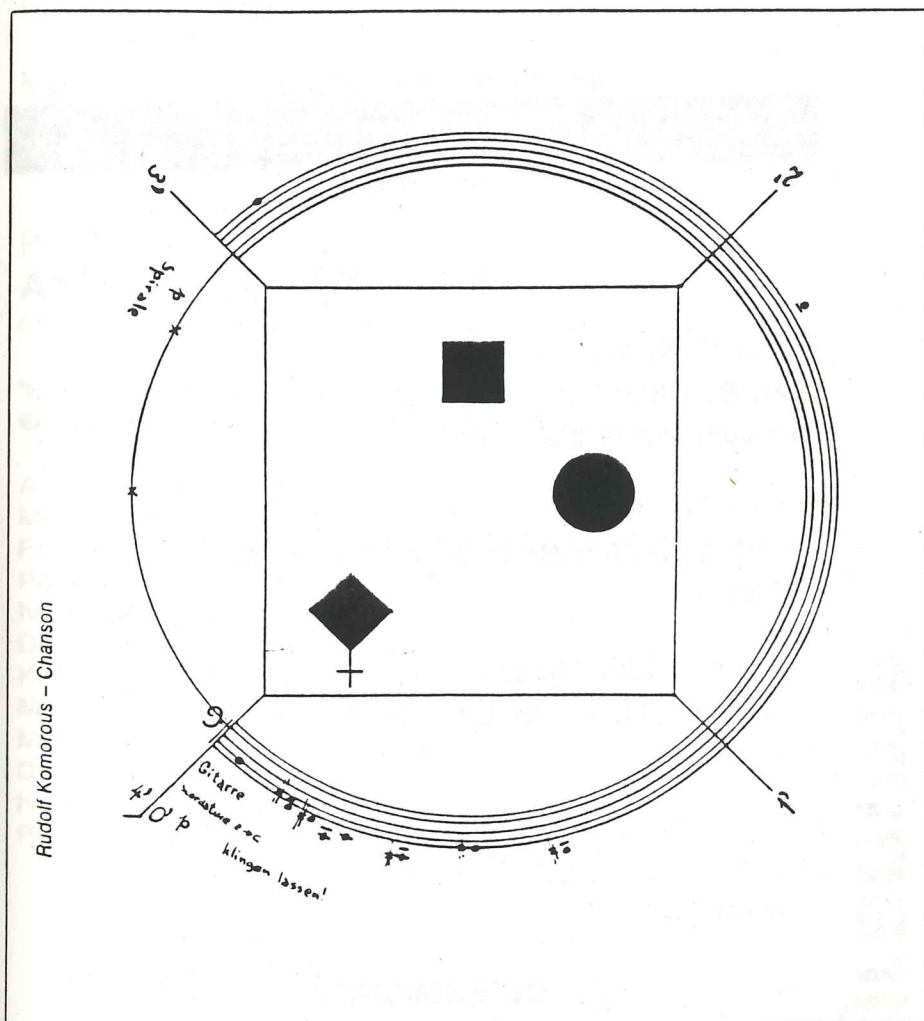
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concerts



new music concerts presents:
AGON Orchestra PRAGUE



8:00pm friday may 24 1996
premiere dance theatre

Friday, May 24, 1996
Premiere Dance Theatre
Harbourfront Centre

new music concerts presents

AGON Orchestra

from Prague

PROGRAMME

Rudolph Komorous (b. 1931)
Sweet Queen (1963) Dur. 4'
for mouth-organs, piano and bass drum

Martin Smolka (b. 1959)
Rent a Ricercar (1993) ▼ Dur. 12'
for 9 players

Petr Kofroň (b. 1955)
Enhexe (1992) ● Dur. 5'
for ensemble

Miroslav Šimáček (b. 1956)
Hard Life (1993) Dur. 10'
for ensemble

INTERMISSION

Rudolph Komorous
Chanson (1965) Dur. 4'
for viola, guitar and clock spiral

programme

Martin Smolka

Euphorium (1996) ● Dur. 12'

version for ensemble

Miroslav Šimáček

Your Time (1994) Dur. 6'

for ensemble

Petr Kofroň

Abram (1994/95) Dur. 15'

for any 8 instruments or 8 groups of any instruments

▼ commissioned by **Musikbiennale Berlin**

● commissioned by **Deutschlandfunk Köln**

AGON:

Martin Čech—flutes, saxophones

Frantisek Kop—clarinets, saxophones

Pavel Borek—trumpet

Ivo Kopecký—trombone, euphonium

Daniel Mikolášek—percussion

Krystof Marek—keyboards, percussion

Martin Smolka—keyboards

Miroslav Šimáček—electric guitar

David Rejchrt—violoncello, viola

Ivan Bierhanzl—acoustic and electric bass

Petr Kofroň—conductor

AGON's tour to Canada is supported in part by the

Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Prague)

Czech Music Fund (Prague)

Foundation "Život umělce" (Prague)

OSA Foundation (Prague)

Open Society Fund (Prague)

Society for New Music (Prague)

Special thanks to Paul R. Wilson

Rudolf Komorous (1931) is one of the most original phenomena of Czech New Music of the sixties. He studied the bassoon and composition at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (1952-59), but the course of his life defied the ordinary beliefs of his contemporaries. He became a member of the neo-dadaist group of artists (*Smidrové*) and then went to Beijing for two years (1959-61) where he taught bassoon and chamber music at the Conservatory. Upon his return he continued his advocacy of dadaism while earning a living as a bassoon player in the Prague Opera orchestra. In 1969 he emigrated to Canada.

During the fifties Komorous developed the so-called "aesthetics of curious things". In contrast to the Abstract aesthetic prevalent at the time he emphasised all things Concrete. One of the many aspects of the Concrete that particularly intrigued him was the possibility of utilising the most peculiar constructions and connections. This "curiousness" of thought found expression in Komorous' music chiefly in the first half of the sixties, in particular in connection with non-traditional instruments and instrumentation. To see and hear a nightingale alongside acolyte bells was one of those "peculiar constructions and connections".

Komorous was greatly influenced by his stay in China. He discovered that only that which is "empty" can be filled (*Tao*); that only silence may be filled with sounds. Thus his music was not a current of sound interrupted by pauses, but a flow of silence interrupted by sound. At the same time Komorous was aware that elementary forms, returned to their essential mould, are filled with the greatest charge, a notion which he must have drawn from oriental calligraphy.

Komorous's compositional development was nurtured in the world of the visual artist rather than that of the musician. He endeavoured to condense his music in one area (a square or a circle), to organise the sounds on a geometric principle and to rid it of the convention in contemporary graphic scores of associating the vertical axis with frequencies and the horizontal with time.

Sweet Queen and *Chanson* are profound contemplations in the construction of sound, a construction built up so thoroughly that it can bear the staggering tension not only in every sound but also in every silence.

Sweet Queen works extensively with sounds (played by the piano and bass drum) that fade into silence. The structure of the piece is very concentrated and focused on the "centre" of the composition. This is especially apparent at the mid-point, as the music returns to its beginning through retrograde motion.

Chanson (see frontispiece) advances the concentration on a single point even further: the nucleus of the score is represented by three signs (interpreted by the viola) which revolve exclusively around the centre and are played out in four different modalities. The notations for the guitar and clock spiral only indicate a certain "framework".

My starting point is the principle that when we remove the old forms we have to organise the musical material in another way (and there is nothing new about that). And here it occurred to me that when we develop a musical composition on a plane (i.e. a geometrical plane), laws similar to those of painting (or geometry) must be valid on that plane as well. The form was previously superior to the detail, or to put it better: the detail was too dependent on the form and was merely able to find its place within the form. What matters to me is a unity that might better bind my compositions together. At first my initial plane was just a very long rectangle (or rather, a strip) on which musical activity evolved. It was a little bit primitive; the stream of music advanced somewhat in an old way and what is most important, proper connections could never be made on this plane. Nowadays I am using regular ratios, for example 2:3 or 3:4, and I am thinking especially of a square and also of a circle. And on this plane there is everything.

—Rudolph Komorous, letter from Beijing, 1960.

Martin Smolka (1959) studied composition at the Prague Conservatory and at the Prague Academy of the Performing Arts. However, his compositional style was also strongly influenced by his private studies with Marek Kopelent (1980-85). In the eighties Smolka reworked the principles of minimalist music through the

employment of a strongly romantic feeling and a certain kind of melancholy. In the nineties he combines several simple musical structures (a "sighing" tone, echoes, sudden alternations of expressive modes, the collapse of the form via progressive erasure...) which he submits to the idea of deconstruction: the music is both horizontally and vertically broken into small pieces. These are then apportioned in often bizzare ways to the individual instruments. As a result, the performance of the composition evokes a kaleidoscopic impression.

In the nineties Smolka participated in a number of projects with the AGON Orchestra and co-operated with the Prague theatre Vizita, well-known for its consummate musical/theatrical improvisations.

Rent a Ricercar (1993) combines two different sources of inspiration. The first one is that of a certain modern *bruitism*: a preoccupation with noises and with the techniques which produce them. But contrary to the admiration of the bruitists of the beginning of the century for technical progress, Smolka admires instead the technique in its "primitive" shape or even in its "garbage" shape. The other inspiration arises from an almost pagan conception of music, for example specific instrumentations based on musical traditions pertaining to spring rites of rejuvenation, and so on.

Rent a Ricercar

way from somewhere to elsewhere
dispersion by the technique of advertising shots
(the poor musicians cannot keep up with the
changes of instruments)

noise, always this noise!
breaking, slitting, crumbling, smashing

way from somewhere to nowhere
idea: civilization machinery (rent a car!) versus
artist (ricercar)
artist gazes at the world rushing to hell
what should a Czech peeper say?

gazing
gazing with a sound track provided
orgy of futility

way from nowhere to nowhere

—Martin Smolka, 1992 (original text in English).

Euphorium (1996) originated thanks to a typo in an old textbook of instrumentation. The caption for the picture of a euphonium said "euphorium". This euphoric music progresses in two streams: the first stream is expressed by a certain primitive pseudo-jazz rhythm, resembling a childishly silly mechanical motion which stutters now and then. The second stream is manifested in constantly accelerating variations on several wind instrument motifs. The motifs are, of course, such that they are hardly playable; nevertheless the musicians must not be ashamed to play as if they were complete nincompoops.

Today, with the Apocalypse already underway, it is clear that the future is wretched and that novelty is revolting. *Futurism*, born of an intoxicatingly hopeful vision of a time yet to come, reflects the patina of past lives. I long for the absurd charms of the original futurism, with its prophetic poetry that sometimes sounds like my grandmother's coffee mill. How beautiful was the future which populated the visions of the Futurists—mechanical science and its noises! No sounds of commercials, TV sets, cassette-players, computers, cars and copters, police and ambulance drivers, no buzzing and whirring of fridges, Laundromats, drills, mixers, saws and all the rush of civilization. Only the delightful mechanical "boom-boom", "khrr-klng-bang". Immediately before the onset of general deafening I invite you to worship at the altar of the good old future of the Futurists.

—Martin Smolka,
The Manifesto of Paleofuturism, 1992.

Petr Kofroň (1955) studied composition privately with Marek Kopelent in Prague and concurrently with Alois Piňos at the Janáček Academy of the Performing Arts in Brno (1974-79). Although Kofroň started with conceptualism, during the seventies and eighties he composed nostalgic, neo-tonal music. At the beginning of the nineties his style underwent a radical change; he renounced traditional musical categories and is now interested only in the energies engendered by music. It is convenient therefore to describe his principles of composition with words like "energy accumulation", "energy compression", "violent energy explosions", "energy waves", "incessant increase in energy", and so on.

Kofroň is also known as a conductor and musicologist. He is the author of *Thirteen Analyses* (a collection of various analytical essays on contemporary Czech music) and writes a regular column about new music for the weekly magazine *Literární noviny*.

Enhexe (1992) seems to be descending into the "atomic level" of tones. An introductory wild and volatile conquest of the tonal surface is followed by the monotonous hammering of the tonal nuclei until finally the music arrives at the ostensibly static centre of the tone. The music appears to be increasingly concentrated around this static point which eventually—at the moment of attainment—explodes with new energy.

Every one of us will experience this journey through fire. And either we will be incinerated and transmogrified into ashes, or the fire will ignite a light in us. These are the moments of the deepest despair, after which follows only disintegration or reintegration.

—František Kabelák,
prominent Czech hermetist, 1958

Abram (1994/95) is presented in three parts. The first part increases the energy by the transference of rhythmical formulae into greater tempos while at the same time accumulating energy through permanent returns in time, according to the principle "two steps forward, one step back...". The second part

changes rapidly between the modes of relaxation and tension. The third part is not built on the volume of energy, but on its speed.

The energy of time is set "at the zero degree".

A new paradigm runs across it—the vertical is important (across styles, genres, landscapes, intentions, concepts...)

Such music is alienated from actualism.

Any kind of linearity has disappeared: the line from kitsch to art, from originality to plagiarism, from beauty to ugliness, etc. Within this new paradigm, it is not at all possible to describe music in such categories.

The core of the new paradigm is the fact that it is not clear "what is happening".

The new paradigm does not recognize the advance to a "higher level". It can be everything, but not necessarily.

The new paradigm is not global but absolutely individual.

Within the new paradigm, things are always repeatable in time because they live in "arrested time".

Repeatability, however, does not increase the force of the past moment; repetition is here merely a succession of discontinuous introductions without any connection between any other introduction.

The new paradigm eternally strengthens the standing moment of the present.

The new paradigm acknowledges *space*.

Within the new paradigm, there is no longer either object or subject; the singular "space of the moment" is the only guarantee here.

Within the new paradigm, neither an object apart from music nor music itself is the essence of music; the essence is the space in which music exists.

Within the new paradigm, time is neither primary or secondary. Time is conceived *as if* it were primary (i.e. as the only thing "which remained"). But space is more important than time, the space

which is expanded into one arrested moment. Within the new paradigm, there is only "pop music"; there is no God, no Music.

Contained in the core of the new paradigm is computer thought.

This thought abolishes both the previous theoretical monism ("yes" is good, "no" has its origin only in the lack of good) and theoretical dualism ("yes" is good, "no" is evil).

The new paradigm establishes binary thought in which "yes" and "no" represent only two concepts which together express reality; neither of them is better or worse. In the context of information, every "yes" can be exchanged for every "no" and vice versa, without any change to a given information.

The new paradigm is neither better nor necessary; it is what is Possible.

—Petr Kofron, from
Twelve Errors of Karl Popper, 1995.

Miroslav Šimáček (1956) studied both electronics and the classical guitar. He is well-known for his participation in alternative rock bands of the seventies and eighties, notably the intuitive music of the group *Kilhets*. After working at several unusual jobs (clerk, garbageman, sound technician) he is now employed as a graphic designer. Šimáček's compositional technique is really a specimen of the construction-kit method. His music is prefabricated in separate "blocks" which are thereafter piled up haphazardly on top of and beside each other. The musical expressivity of these "blocks" is situated somewhere between New Music, rock, and the folk music of the Moravian highlands.

Hard Life (1993) is a realisation of older graphic sketches of shapes and directions. They are embedded in a rhythmical net provided by small drums and "high-hat" cymbals. Although the music is "directed" by these percussive instruments, because of their monotony the listener perceives them only as a background. From the point of view of expression, the music can be characterized as standing at the border between festivity and an imminent threat.

Your Time (1994) is built mainly on a unique system of repetition and change of individual musical monoliths. Everything is seemingly the same, yet different. At the level of expression, the composition suggests an almost animal joy.

*Think more about the future
this will not last forever
Your time is yet to come
Your time is yet to come Your time*

AGON ORCHESTRA was formed in 1983, as a platform for a group of young Czech composers and musicians whose activities developed outside the boundaries of the cultural establishment of that time. Besides Czech composers, AGON presented numerous Czech premieres of works by composers such as John Cage, Morton Feldman, Arvo Pärt, Steve Reich and Giacinto Scelsi.

After 1989 AGON produced and performed several thematic concerts centred on avant-garde and cross-over tendencies in new music—from *Micro-tonal Music*, through *Czech New Music of the 1960s* and *An Anthology of Czech and World Avant-Garde*, to *Graphic and Conceptual Scores*, as well as the program *Alternative*, in which AGON presented experimental works by Czech rock musicians and visual and performance artists.

The members of AGON come from diverse backgrounds such as the Czech Philharmonic, the State Opera and modern jazz and alternative rock circles. With the help of a combination of acoustic and amplified instruments the sound of AGON unites the aggressivity of a rock band together with the precision of a chamber ensemble performing classical music.

AGON has appeared both on small domestic stages and at prestigious international festivals in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, England and the United States and has produced a number of recordings for radio, television and record companies. In 1994 AGON received the Golden Harmony Award for the best CD of contemporary Czech music.

Selected CD Recordings:

AGON

Arta Records (1991), F1 0018-2

Works by J. Adamik, P. Kofroň, M. Pudlák, M. Smolka

Czech New Music of the 1960s

Arta Records (1994), F1 0048-2

Works by J. Berg, R. Komorous, J. Rychlik, Z. Vostřák

Graphic and Conceptual Scores

Arta Records (1996), F1 0063-2

Works by J. Cage, C. Cardew, D. Goode, M. Grygar, M. Knižák,
A. Logothetis, M. Nyman, M. Palla, M. Ponc, K.P. Röhl

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

New Music Concerts is pleased to announce that our Artistic Director, **Robert Aitken**, was recently presented with the Jean A. Chalmers National Music Prize awarded by the **Chalmers Foundation** in recognition of Creativity and Excellence in the Arts.

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